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Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions

Assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in compliance with General Assembly resolution 59/172 on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa and draws on information received from a number of United Nations organizations. It updates the information contained in the report of the Secretary-General submitted to the Assembly at its fifty-ninth session (A/59/317) and contains an overview of developments, more detailed regional updates, information about specific areas of inter-agency cooperation and cooperation with regional organizations and efforts to coordinate resources. The period covered is 2004 and the first half of 2005.

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I. Introduction

1. Despite some fluid political and security situations and unresolved conflicts, a number of long-standing conflicts in Africa have ended or are in the process of being resolved, including in Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and southern Sudan. This has provided large groups of African refugees with a unique opportunity for voluntary repatriation, which the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) continued this year to place at the top of its agenda in Africa.

2. Since the last report, several repatriation operations have been completed, including those for Sierra Leonean refugees and Somali refugees (from "Somaliland") in Ethiopia. Others are continuing, such as those for Burundian, Rwandan and Angolan refugees. A number of new repatriation operations were also launched, including the organized repatriation of Liberian refugees and the repatriation of Congolese refugees from the Central African Republic and the Republic of the Congo. It is hoped that organized repatriation of Sudanese refugees to southern Sudan will start in the coming months.

3. Political unrest and social tensions nevertheless continued to prevail in some regions of Africa, producing movements of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), mainly in West Africa (Côte d'Ivoire, Togo), the Great Lakes region (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic) and the Sudan. The combined result of voluntary repatriation and new outflows was that the number of refugees continued to decrease slightly, from 2.9 million at the end of 2003 to 2.8 million at the end of 2004. African refugees still represent about one third of the global refugee population and, in addition, Africa has some 200,000 asylum-seekers and 330,000 returnees. Of the world's 25 million IDPs, 13 million are in Africa. In that regard, the tragedy of Darfur has been of particular concern.

4. Governmental, United Nations, international, regional and non-governmental partners reinforced cooperation to meet protection and assistance needs through improved coordination, joint missions, the development of field guidelines and improved methodologies and tools. Nevertheless, chronic funding shortfalls and difficulties in bridging the gap between humanitarian assistance and development activities, particularly in return situations, continued to be problematic, despite advocacy efforts for African programmes and renewed hope generated by the recent Group of Eight (G-8) Summit, which focused on poverty alleviation in Africa.

II. Regional overviews

A. East Africa and the Horn of Africa

5. Persistent insecurity and human rights violations in Darfur increased the international focus on the humanitarian situation in the Sudan. In Somalia, despite political progress, the situation remains volatile in the centre and south of the country, where the humanitarian community faces major constraints to access populations in need of assistance.

Darfur crisis

6. The crisis in the Darfur region of the Sudan continued to pose major challenges to the humanitarian community at large. The escalation of the conflict led to additional displacement, resulting in nearly 2 million IDPs and more than 200,000 refugees in neighbouring Chad as of April 2005.

7. The initial international response to the Darfur crisis in 2003 and the first half of 2004 was limited as the crisis received little international attention, but the response has significantly improved since then. There are currently some 79 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and 13 United Nations agencies active in Darfur, comprising about 11,500 humanitarian staff, compared to 228 humanitarian staff active in April 2004. The response to the IDP crisis is a collaborative effort under the overall leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator based in Khartoum. In west Darfur, UNHCR established a presence in El Geneina in June 2004 to create an environment of protection and establish conditions conducive to the return of IDPs and refugees from Chad, monitoring the security situation in areas of origin. This engagement was further developed when the Secretary-General requested UNHCR in October 2004 to take responsibility for the protection and voluntary return of IDPs to their villages of origin in west Darfur in partnership with other agencies. This is complementary to the monitoring and coordination mechanism agreement signed with the International Organization for Migration in August 2004, which now covers north and south Darfur, on protecting the rights of IDPs to safe, voluntary and dignified return.

8. In order to address protection needs and assistance gaps, UNHCR has started small-scale community-based reintegration projects in villages where people have spontaneously returned and has been providing its expertise to the Government of the Sudan and the United Nations and other agencies to enhance the quality of protection and assistance to IDPs in Darfur.

Southern Sudan

9. The pace of spontaneous return of refugees and IDPs to southern Sudan has intensified since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in January 2005 between the Government of the Sudan and the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement. Though estimates indicate 600,000 people have returned over the past two years, there are still some 500,000 refugees in seven countries of asylum and over 4 million southern Sudanese IDPs. Apart from its responsibility to assist the return and reintegration of refugees, UNHCR has been requested by the Humanitarian Coordinator to coordinate the return and reintegration of IDPs in Greater Equatoria and Blue Nile states, within the context of the United Nations work plan and in close collaboration with Government authorities, United Nations agencies and NGOs. These activities will aim to create an environment conducive to sustainable return in sectors such as physical protection, water, sanitation, education, livelihoods, community infrastructure, reconciliation and coexistence projects.

Eastern Sudan

10. Despite the UNHCR target of facilitating the voluntary repatriation of 35,000 Eritrean refugees, less than 10,000 refugees actually repatriated in 2004. UNHCR continues to provide humanitarian assistance to 110,000 Eritrean refugees living in

camps in eastern Sudan who do not wish to or cannot return home. UNHCR, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and other development agencies jointly launched the innovative programme on the theme "Sustainable options for livelihood security in east Sudan" in 2004 to build sustainable livelihoods in and around former refugee camps.

Chad

11. The humanitarian community continued to respond to the emergency following the massive influx of Sudanese refugees from the Darfur region into eastern Chad. By the end of 2004, nearly 200,000 Sudanese refugees who had spontaneously settled along the 600-kilometre border with the Sudan had been relocated to 11 refugee camps. With the opening of the twelfth refugee camp in May at Gaga, the majority of refugees are now residing in camps.

12. Besides security considerations, water availability remained a major concern in identifying sites and developing refugee camps. Other challenges included logistical difficulties in moving humanitarian commodities to a wide and scattered area of eastern Chad, environmental considerations and tension with local communities over scarce resources. UNHCR and its partners are addressing these challenges through projects which benefit both refugees and local communities.

13. In southern Chad, nearly 30,000 refugees from the Central African Republic who had settled spontaneously in villages along the border were relocated to two refugee camps to help them embark upon agricultural activities. In June 2005 a new influx of some 7,000 refugees who fled general insecurity in the northern part of the Central African Republic were being relocated further inland for their own security and to facilitate the provision of international protection and assistance.

Somalia

14. In addition to the relative peace and stability which has reigned in north-west Somalia (Somaliland) and north-east Somalia (Puntland) for some years, the ongoing Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)-sponsored peace process has moved forward. Somalia also has had a Transitional Federal Government since late 2004. However, the political and socio-economic landscape still poses many challenges, and insecurity continues to prevail in parts of south and central Somalia.

15. A positive achievement was the completion in May 2005 of the repatriation of 240,000 refugees from Ethiopia to Somaliland, enabling UNHCR to close seven out of the eight camps in eastern Ethiopia. More than 18,000 refugees returned to Somalia in 2004 and some 7,000 have returned so far in 2005, mainly from Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya. There are still some 389,000 Somali refugees worldwide, mainly from south and central Somalia. Of growing concern is the continuous outflow of Somali refugees towards Yemen, with more than 14,000 new arrivals since mid-2004. In addition, an estimated 400,000 IDPs scattered in 34 urban settlements in Somalia and the destitute urban populations, including returnees, are in chronic need of assistance.

16. In July 2004, UNHCR launched a preparatory project for the elaboration of a comprehensive plan of action to pursue durable solutions and improved protection

for Somali refugees. The plan of action will be developed and discussed through national consultations held in each of the main countries of asylum in the region (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Yemen), bringing together national authorities, donors contributing to this initiative, United Nations agencies, NGOs and other stakeholders.

Uganda

17. Uganda, which hosts nearly 240,000 refugees, received some 30,000 new arrivals coming from the neighbouring Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda since January 2004. In particular, some 18,000 Sudanese refugees entered Uganda at an average rate of over a thousand a month, claiming insecurity due to the Lord's Resistance Army fighting, inter-ethnic positioning and lack of food in southern Sudan. Repeated attacks by the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda also led to the displacement of refugees and Ugandans and generated security concerns. Eighteen years of conflict in 19 northern districts in Uganda has led to the displacement of up to 2 million Ugandans, many of whom live in camps where the quality of life is still marked by significant gaps in humanitarian assistance and camp management.

18. Due to ongoing internal clashes in the Kivu and Ituri regions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, an estimated 20,000 refugees have fled to Uganda since December 2004. While some refugees have gone home since then, 8,000 remain in Uganda and were transferred to Kyaka II camp in Kenjojo District.

B. West Africa

19. Although significant progress has been achieved in Sierra Leone and Liberia, the West Africa region still hosts more than 400,000 refugees. The overall situation remained volatile, particularly in Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Guinea-Bissau and Guinea, and contingency plans are regularly updated. Longer-term strategies to address the problems of unemployed youth and regional disarmament, demobilization and reintegration remain challenges to effective reintegration, socio-economic recovery and political stability, including conflict prevention.

Liberia

20. UNHCR has assisted almost 32,000 refugees to return to Liberia since launching the voluntary repatriation operation in October 2004, in addition to more than 119,000 others who have returned spontaneously. Repatriation is expected to be actively promoted after the elections are held at the end of 2005.

21. In close cooperation with other humanitarian actors, UNHCR assisted nearly 190,000 IDPs to return to their areas of origin in all 15 counties, providing returnee packages, transportation or cash grants and community-based assistance to promote sustainable reintegration.

22. UNHCR continues to provide protection to 12,700 refugees from Côte d'Ivoire living mostly with host communities in the eastern part of Liberia and is trying to facilitate the local integration of the 2,800 Sierra Leonean refugees who chose not to return.

Côte d'Ivoire

23. The political and security situation in Côte d'Ivoire remains fluid, especially in the west, where the ongoing inflammation of ethnic and religious tensions, increased militia attacks and inter- and intra-community conflict created a confusing myriad of displacement and return, including an additional outflow of 10,000 refugees to neighbouring countries in November 2004. Although most refugees from Côte d'Ivoire have returned spontaneously, UNHCR remains on alert and has set up preparedness response mechanisms. Despite the climate of insecurity, UNHCR continues to deliver assistance and monitor conditions in refugee sites and villages for some 53,000 refugees.

24. Efforts by humanitarian agencies to provide support to the estimated half a million IDPs continued, but the response was hampered by endemic insecurity and limited access. Following the outbreak of fighting in various parts of the country in November 2004, many humanitarian agencies were forced to suspend operations and evacuate personnel temporarily.

Sierra Leone

25. The assisted repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees that started in 2000 ended on 31 December 2004, bringing more than 270,000 refugees back home, nearly 180,000 with UNHCR assistance. Reintegration programmes continue in 2005 with increased or, in some sectors, exclusive involvement of development agencies and other actors. The care and maintenance programme for Liberian refugees has continued, along with voluntary repatriation to Liberia.

Togo crisis

26. As a consequence of the violence that followed the Togo April 2005 presidential elections, more than 38,000 Togolese nationals fled to neighbouring Benin and Ghana, where they receive international protection and assistance. While refugees in Ghana are staying with host communities, more than 8,000 refugees live in two refugee sites in the western part of Benin and others with host communities. Early preparedness mechanisms helped UNHCR to provide humanitarian assistance to refugees without delay, in coordination with other United Nations organizations, host Governments and NGOs. The operation has now entered its post-emergency phase. Major constraints are the lack of funds to cover the needs of refugees in both countries of asylum and difficulties in access to beneficiaries in Ghana due to the wide geographical area. The crisis also generated about 15,000 IDPs within Togo, whose needs are being addressed through the United Nations country team collaborative approach.

Guinea

27. Guinea continued to be a safe haven for refugees fleeing conflict in four of its six neighbouring countries (Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire), despite poor living conditions and an unstable internal political and social situation. Of the 120,000 refugees in Guinea, some 76,000 are assisted in camps or local integration settlements.

C. Central Africa and the Great Lakes region

28. No major upheaval was witnessed in the Great Lakes region in 2004, apart from the ongoing tensions in the Kivus and inter-ethnic clashes in Ituri in the north-eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. A major peace effort in the subregion, initiated by the United Nations and supported by the African Union, culminated in the International Conference on Peace, Security, Democracy and Development in the Great Lakes Region in November 2004 in the United Republic of Tanzania. It was in that context that operations in the subregion, which hosts more than 1.2 million refugees, focused on voluntary repatriation.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

29. While the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been at the epicentre of regional crises since the mid-1990s, more recent developments raise hopes for the repatriation of refugees to some areas of the country, despite the postponement of the elections.

30. The relative calm in some provinces over the past few years has resulted in UNHCR initiating an assistance operation for Congolese refugees returning to their home areas. UNHCR is facilitating voluntary repatriation to areas which have been secure for a number of years, such as Equateur province, where UNHCR covers all aspects of the return movement and initial reintegration efforts. Other areas, such as South Kivu, are considered too volatile for returns, though spontaneous returnees are provided with community-based assistance to aid their reintegration. With the launching of the repatriation operations from the Central African Republic in October 2004 and the Republic of the Congo in April 2005, almost 12,000 refugees have returned home since October 2004. UNHCR is also articulating a multi-year operations plan (2005 to 2007) to facilitate the phased return of the 381,000 refugees from nine neighbouring countries, including 150,000 beneficiaries in the United Republic of Tanzania.

31. It is estimated that there are some 2.3 million IDPs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Much of the eastern part of the country remains volatile and insecure. In particular, resumed fighting and insecurity in Ituri and the Kivu provinces resulted in the renewed displacement of tens of thousands of civilians and the suspension of humanitarian aid to several areas of the Ituri district after the murder of nine peacekeepers. In spite of the continued violence and human rights abuses, there are pockets of stability where in many cases small-scale recovery projects have already started. Humanitarian activities related to the return of IDPs have until now focused mainly on transport assistance and the distribution of return packages, while working groups on sexual violence and child protection have been set up in a number of places.

Burundi

32. Delays in the political transition since the October 2003 agreement between the Government of Burundi and the main armed rebel groups have given rise to fears among the refugee population and slowed repatriation. However, more than 90,000 refugees, the vast majority returning from the United Republic of Tanzania, repatriated in 2004, bringing the total number of returnees since 2002 to 225,000.

More than 19,300 Burundians have repatriated so far in 2005. There are still more than 600,000 Burundian refugees in neighbouring countries.

33. The long-term consequences of the Burundi crisis continue to require a combination of responses ranging from life-saving activities to strengthening community-based reconstruction initiatives and supporting reintegration in the short term for both returnees and IDPs. To achieve these objectives, UNHCR in Burundi joined efforts with other United Nations organizations, the Burundian authorities and more than 20 NGOs, and is an active member of the *Cellule Inter-Agence de Réinsertion* (CIR). CIR has issued a common strategy for the reintegration of the affected population to implement a repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction initiative, which will allow UNHCR to phase out its activities progressively and hand over to development agencies.

34. UNHCR also provides international protection and assistance to some 17,000 refugees, 7,500 of whom are camp-based Congolese refugees, including the survivors of the August 2004 Gatumba massacre, who were transferred to Gasorwe and Gihinga refugee camps.

Rwanda

35. In addition to providing international protection and material assistance to Congolese and Burundian refugees, UNHCR has been promoting the repatriation of Rwandan refugees and monitoring their reintegration in local communities. In 2005, more than 5,400 refugees returned to Rwanda, in addition to the almost 13,500 who returned in 2004.

36. After the opening of 12,000 gacaca courts nationwide, several thousand Rwandan asylum-seekers fled to Uganda and Burundi in April 2005, citing threats and rumours of massacres and revenge attacks. The claims of the Rwandan asylum-seekers are being examined by the Government in Uganda through a refugee status determination process, while more than 5,000 Rwandan asylum-seekers who sought refuge in Burundi were forcibly returned to Rwanda in June by the Burundi Government, despite an official protest by UNHCR that that operation was not in line with international protection principles against refoulement.

D. Southern Africa

37. The overall political stability in the region allowed for a sustained shift of focus from crisis management to long-term development and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. With a return to peace, especially in Angola, and the absence of any major displacement, UNHCR and its partners concentrated on pursuing durable solutions for protracted refugee situations, including the repatriation of Angolan refugees and the continuation of the Zambia Initiative aimed at facilitating the local integration of refugees.

38. UNHCR launched, in Malawi, a regional registration project in mid-2004, aimed at systematically registering all refugees and asylum-seekers and issuing identity cards.

39. Though the legal landscape remained generally friendly to refugees and asylum-seekers, the organization of several "clean-up" operations affected asylum-seekers and refugees. In Zimbabwe, Operation Restore Order, which started in

May 2005, has so far resulted in the displacement of about 700,000 individuals and has created a human settlement crisis. Many refugees and asylum-seekers were detained for being in urban centres without authorization. Démarches ensured that the majority were released upon condition of relocating Tongogara refugee camp. The relocation is facing problems, including the camp absorption capacity and the provision of assistance, despite the World Food Programme (WFP) provision of one-time emergency food for some 4,500 persons.

Angola

40. More than 300,000 Angolan refugees have returned home since the signing of the peace accord in 2002. UNHCR expects that the voluntary repatriation of the 53,000 Angolans still remaining in camps and settlements in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zambia and Namibia will be completed by the end of 2005. Increasingly, the focus is turning towards reintegration, including community services. The isolated provinces to which most refugees are returning are among the most affected by almost three decades of conflict. Additional repatriation corridors have opened in the last few months, though the registration for return has been low in Namibia and Zambia, due partly to concerns over elections planned for 2006.

III. Specific areas of inter-agency cooperation

A. Protection

Respect for international protection principles and strengthening protection capacity

41. The refugee protection environment in Africa continued to be generally positive, with most new arrivals gaining access to asylum, for example in Togo and Uganda, and Governments respecting overall the rights of refugees. Nevertheless, some situations are a source of concern, including the forced return in June of more than 5,000 Rwandan asylum-seekers from northern Burundi, and the recent eviction and arrest of thousands of refugees and asylum-seekers in Zimbabwe in a general crackdown on slum dwellers in Harare.

42. UNHCR, with the support of the donor community, has significantly reinforced its protection presence through the deployment of additional staff to implement and monitor protection activities at the field level. In that regard, UNHCR will have created 52 new protection posts and protection-related posts between July 2004 and December 2005, in addition to protection staff deployed in the framework of specific field-deployment schemes with partners. UNHCR has started a pilot project aimed at strengthening protection capacity in the United Republic of Tanzania, Kenya, Benin and Burkina Faso. Gaps identified in the current protection and assistance context in the country will be analysed and prioritized in a national consultation forum where the host Government, donors, NGOs, United Nations organizations and refugees will agree upon measures to fill gaps. The final phase of the project will translate these gaps into projects to enhance the protection capacity in the country concerned.

Security of refugee settlements and staff security

43. The physical security of refugees, including camp security, has required continuous vigilance and attention from countries of asylum and UNHCR. The August 2004 massacre of 152 Congolese refugees sheltered in the Gatumba transit centre at the Burundi/Congolese border illustrated the serious challenge of ensuring the security of refugees and the importance of transferring refugees away from border areas, as was recently done in Rwanda for Congolese refugees.

44. Serious violence also occurred in May this year in refugee camps in eastern Chad. At Iridimi Camp, three refugees were shot when refugees opposed to a re-registration exercise clashed with Chadian police responsible for providing camp security. At Goz Amer camp, a Chadian customs official and three refugees were killed by gunshot wounds sustained in a confrontation ignited by the seizure of plastic sheeting sold by refugees in the camp market. In western Ethiopia, access to refugees has been a challenge until recently because of insecurity caused by intercommunal violence.

45. In the area of cooperation with other agencies, UNHCR convened a meeting of experts in 2004 on maintaining the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum with other organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, to elaborate operational guidelines, which are currently being finalized. UNHCR and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations have also embarked on a staff exchange programme to operationalize the five areas of cooperation agreed in 2004; namely, refugee/returnee security; the rule of law; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; mine action; and technical cooperation.

46. With regard to staff safety, UNHCR increased the total number of its field safety staff in Africa by six, to Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan. A number of measures on physical security of office premises and assets have been implemented and are ongoing, along with the training of staff, including senior managers and local field safety personnel.

Registration and documentation

47. UNHCR reinforced its capacity to provide better protection with the implementation of Project Profile, which represents the effort of the Office to improve the standards and methodologies for registering and documenting refugees. Great progress has been made in issuing identity or other forms of documentation in a number of African countries, such as Botswana, Guinea, Liberia, Malawi, and Mozambique. Other benefits of Project Profile include detailed profiling to facilitate durable solutions and assistance activities. The new registration database application developed by Project Profile has so far been installed in 18 operations throughout the continent.

Age, gender and diversity mainstreaming

48. In 2004 UNHCR tested a methodology for mainstreaming age and gender into country operations more systematically. The initiative comprises three main elements: the establishment of multifunctional teams; participatory assessment with refugee men, women, boys and girls; and capacity-building workshops. The methodology was tested in 14 countries, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea,

Sierra Leone and Zambia. In early 2005, the methodology was evaluated and worldwide implementation was recommended. The roll-out in 2005 targets operations in Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and southern Sudan.

Protection of refugee women

49. The High Commissioner's Five Commitments to Refugee Women[1] and the age, gender and diversity mainstreaming initiative remain the main guides for enhancing gender equality and participation for refugee women in Africa. In 2005 a report on the Five Commitments indicated that between 2003 and 2005 there was a gradual but significant improvement in female representation in camp management and leadership positions. The degree of participation of women in the distribution of food and non-food items improved markedly, but the challenge of participation in actual decision-making remains. UNHCR, WFP and other partners will jointly address this through activities targeting camps with levels of less than 50 per cent participation by women in food distribution. Refugee women had access to sanitary materials in an increased number of operations.

Prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence

50. UNHCR has put country-level strategies in place in most African countries to address problems of sexual and gender-based violence. UNHCR and partner staff, together with refugee representatives, Governments and other United Nations organizations, cooperate to promote the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence and response initiatives in a multisectoral approach. Specific programmes have been initiated in Guinea and Sierra Leone by refugees themselves to mobilize men and boys on prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence. In a partnership with the University of Northumbria (Disaster and Development Centre), consultants have studied the psychosocial problems in Darfur and will provide guidance to UNHCR and partner staff to address psychosocial trauma and to strengthen the capacities of the IDP communities.

Protection of refugee children

51. Child protection was strengthened through increased field support; the age, gender and diversity mainstreaming strategy; and Action for the Rights of Children (ARC) capacity-building activities. Partnerships and networks with donors, United Nations organizations, NGOs and host Governments were strengthened to support the protection of refugee girls and boys. In West Africa, regular regional inter-agency meetings were held with a particular focus on unaccompanied and separated children. In repatriation operations, measures to prevent separation were taken in countries of asylum and countries of origin, and protection and care mechanisms were put in place to meet the specific needs of unaccompanied and separated children before, during and upon their return. There was close cooperation with the ICRC and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). In Angola technical support was provided to the Government national family tracing and reunification programme, ensuring rapid identification, family tracing and reunification.

52. ARC has continued to engage partner agencies, Government counterparts and refugees in identifying and addressing child protection issues in field operations. Training sessions have been held throughout Africa and an evaluation of the project

has been commissioned in order to analyse the relevance and impact of ARC and recommend future directions.

53. Technical and financial support were given to innovative rights-based projects addressing key child protection concerns of refugee girls and boys, focusing in particular on adolescents. Examples of field activities include child empowerment projects in Uganda and Botswana and psychosocial support through art projects in South Africa.

B. Durable solutions

Voluntary repatriation and the need for sustainable reintegration and transition towards development

54. Voluntary repatriation continued to make considerable progress and remained the preferred durable solution for refugees in Africa. In pursuit of sustainable durable solutions and voluntary repatriation in particular, UNHCR continued to advocate for conflict prevention and the sustained commitment of the international community to the reconstruction and peacebuilding processes in various regions of Africa and, in that regard, continued to foster strategic partnerships with development agencies, regional organizations, NGOs and other partners.

55. The challenge in repatriation operations in Africa remains ensuring their sustainability. UNHCR and its partners work with countries of origin to create "pull factors" for the return of refugees, such as the upgrading of basic services, the creation of livelihood opportunities and, importantly, the establishment of law and order. Inter-agency programmes aim at integrating responses in respect of the repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction process. Tangible success in the area of disarmament and demobilization is also key in most repatriation operations, as ineffective reintegration of ex-combatants puts sustainable return of refugees and regional stability at risk.

56. In Liberia, in line with the transitional planning approach to repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction, a memorandum of understanding has been signed between UNDP and UNHCR to develop seamless transition from relief to recovery and to strengthen the capacity of community structures in areas of high return. These community structures facilitate community representation in the assessment and selection of community empowerment projects. More than 700 community-driven microprojects are currently at various stages of implementation in the key sectors of basic services, shelter and community services. Similar initiatives have been developed with the United Nations Development Fund for Women, UNICEF and UN-Habitat geared at mainstreaming gender in start-up community development activities.

57. Several project activities have also been launched to generate new livelihood and income-generation opportunities for refugees and returnees, in the framework of the International Labour Organization (ILO)/UNHCR partnership to support the reintegration of returnees and refugee self-reliance. From January 2004 to February 2005, ILO and UNHCR personnel worked side by side in the Gash Barka region of Eritrea for the rehabilitation of public infrastructure projects employing local workforces and creating employment service centres.

Self-reliance and local integration

58. The self-reliance of refugees is a vital means to reduce dependence on humanitarian assistance and to prepare refugees for durable solutions, particularly in protracted refugee situations. In addition to the Zambia Initiative for Angolans in Zambia, based on the concept of development through local integration of refugees, and the self-reliance strategy for Sudanese refugees in Uganda, similar initiatives have been taken in Gabon for Congolese refugees and in Guinea and Liberia for Sierra Leonean refugees. Particular refugee groups targeted are ones in protracted situations who chose not to repatriate or who come from extremely volatile and insecure areas and for whom return is not an option.

Resettlement to third countries

59. UNHCR has put increased emphasis on the strategic use of resettlement in its operations in Africa. This has included planning the resettlement of individuals and groups in combination with other durable solutions in a manner that benefits not only persons being resettled but also the host country, the receiving country and refugees remaining in the countries of first asylum. Group resettlement of Liberian refugees from Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Ghana and of the Somali Bantu refugees in Kenya is ongoing, along with the usual submissions and processing of individual resettlement cases. The resettlement departures from Africa rose by over 13 per cent in 2004, with 19,530 persons being resettled, compared to 17,255 resettled in 2003.

C. Delivery of assistance and special needs

60. UNHCR has continued its efforts to improve the delivery of assistance, especially to those beneficiaries with special protection and assistance needs.

Use of standards and indicators

61. The use of standards and indicators in refugee programming piloted in 2003 and systematically implemented by most UNHCR offices in 2004 has started to show tangible results in the first half of 2005, with improvements in some of the standards of assistance and protection in refugee camps. However, an analysis of field reports shows a number of sectors where the standards still need to be improved, including water, female participation in refugee community representation, teacher-to-student ratios and post-primary education opportunities for adolescents. Refugee participation in needs assessments, one key aspect of the standards and indicators process, has been increased.

Food

62. WFP and UNHCR continued to cooperate closely to meet the food assistance needs of refugees and returnees in 22 African countries and to identify how best to deal with any food shortfalls and minimize the significant impact such shortages have on the protection of beneficiaries, particularly refugee women and children. Such food shortages were experienced or are expected in particular in Burundi, Chad, Guinea, Kenya, Sierra Leone, and the United Republic of Tanzania. In 2004, WFP took over food distribution in Kenya, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zambia, in accordance with the revised memorandum of understanding between the two organizations. The year 2004 also saw the finalization of the Joint Assessment

Guidelines, which have been disseminated to field offices and reflected in programming for refugees. In 2004, WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF also worked together to develop a set of guidelines on programme options for HIV/AIDS and food and nutrition in refugee settings.

63. WFP and UNHCR continued to carry out together joint assessment missions to assess the food and non-food aid requirements of refugees, such as the missions undertaken in Burundi, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Republic of Tanzania. WFP and UNHCR also conducted joint reviews in Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania to investigate acute child malnutrition in relation to food aid and other factors known to affect nutritional outcomes. Beneficiary verification exercises were also carried out in several countries, such as Guinea and Sierra Leone, where they resulted in a reduction in the number of refugees requiring assistance.

Education

64. Access to education is an important protection tool to bring stability to children affected by war and displacement, but also to shield them from exploitative activities such as child labour, military recruitment and sexual abuse. UNHCR continued to promote this right through close partnerships with Governments, United Nations organizations, the refugee community and NGOs.

65. The main focus of activities continued to be ensuring access to primary education and supporting access to secondary and higher education where possible. In particular, UNHCR made continuous efforts to promote girls' education in Africa by working closely with UNICEF, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies and local organizations such as the Forum for African Women Educationalists. One activity is the introduction by the International Rescue Committee of female classroom assistants in Guinea to improve safety for girls and provide role models. To address the enormous gender gap in basic education in southern Sudan, UNICEF supported the establishment of 250 community girls' schools, giving 9,000 young girls a chance to attend school for the first time.

66. Lack of access, insecurity and great distances to reach schools, child labour to cover unmet assistance needs and the disruption of the school cycle due to flight or repatriation are major reasons behind the difficulties in meeting education standards. For instance, 55 per cent of children of primary school age in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are out of the education system as a result of the war. In Liberia, since 2004, though UNICEF has provided educational materials for over one million children, needs continue to be enormous as large returns of IDP and refugee populations create an urgent need for schools.

67. The Peace Education Programme has also been implemented in a number of operations in Africa, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, southern Sudan and Uganda. The programme provides the constructive life skills of peace and conflict minimization and prevention to refugee and returnee children, youth and the wider community through experiential learning and training.

Health

68. The World Health Organization (WHO) and UNHCR spearheaded the Inter-Agency Health Evaluations in Humanitarian Crises Initiative, which comprise sectorwide evaluations that examine the collective impact of health sector interventions. An inter-agency evaluation has been completed in Burundi, pointing to cross-border and repatriation health issues, such as the difference in quality of health care and malaria control between refugee camps in the United Republic of Tanzania and areas of return in Burundi. Commencing in the United Republic of Tanzania, the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention is supporting UNHCR to implement a standardized Health Information System to provide a common data set for programme planning, monitoring and evaluation. UNHCR continued to work with sister agencies, ministries of health and other partners to assist in health sector rehabilitation in major return operations. Health-care assistance is also provided in refugee programmes such as those in Chad, where WHO reinforced its presence to promote humanitarian health services. Inter-agency and NGO interventions also took place in displacement emergencies associated with conflict, like those in Côte d'Ivoire and Togo, and IDP situations such as those in northern Uganda.

69. Several initiatives were also carried out throughout the year in the area of reproductive health. In Liberia, for instance, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) supported the establishment of adolescent-friendly corners in IDP camps in Liberia, where youth can get information, services and a sense of security. In Darfur, UNFPA provided supplies and equipment for safe childbirth, blood transfusions, prevention of sexually transmissible infections and other reproductive health needs.

HIV/AIDS

70. Combating HIV/AIDS among refugees, returnees and other IDPs, as well as ensuring that the human rights of those living with HIV/AIDS are duly respected, remained high priorities on the agenda of United Nations agencies and partners. Collaboration at the regional and the country level was further developed through high-level and technical joint assessment missions, as well as strategic planning, technical support and partnership mobilization. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Force on HIV/AIDS in Emergency Settings, under the chairmanship of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), has tested and promoted the use of the 2004 guidelines on HIV/AIDS in emergency settings and has conducted training sessions in different contexts. In addition, the World Bank, UNHCR and the UNAIDS secretariat worked closely on several projects, including the subregional Great Lakes Initiative on AIDS and other multicountry AIDS programmes. Other regional initiatives included the regional initiative for the Horn of Africa, targeting in particular conflict-affected populations (mobile populations, refugees, returnees and displaced persons), and the Mano River Union Initiative on HIV/AIDS, launched with the objective of reducing the rate of transmission of HIV among and between priority target populations, including but not limited to refugees, returnees and host communities.

D. Internally displaced persons in Africa

71. More people are internally displaced in Africa than in the rest of the world put together. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimated that in 2005 some 13 million of the world's 25 million internally displaced persons were in 21 countries in Africa. Although the total number of IDPs remained almost unchanged since the last reporting period, both new displacements and returns occurred during the 2004-2005 period. The Sudan has more IDPs than any other country in the world, while other large-scale displacement crises in Africa included the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda.

72. The Sudan, with the escalation of conflict in Darfur, saw an increase of over 1.6 million IDPs, bringing the total IDP population there to an unprecedented 6 million. At the same time, voluntary returns took place: some 150,000 IDPs returned to southern Sudan in the first quarter of 2005, adding to the half million who returned in 2004.

73. Large numbers of people were also newly displaced in Uganda, bringing the total IDP population to some two million people, with up to 90 per cent of the entire population in northern Uganda living in camps.

74. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates that about one million IDPs have spontaneously returned home in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Yet, renewed fighting in the eastern Kivu provinces and in the north-eastern Ituri district again resulted in the displacement of tens of thousands of people. In Burundi, continuous armed clashes between the Transitional Government and the Front national de libération, concentrated in Bujumbura rural areas and the densely populated outskirts of Bujumbura, led to recurrent waves of forced displacement. However, the overall progress of the political transition contributed to the relative stabilization of the security situation in the country in 2004 and IDPs continued returning home, especially those in the south and eastern provinces.

75. The deepening xenophobia in the western part of Côte d'Ivoire resulted in the flight of thousands of civilians. On a more positive note, return began taking place in Liberia. In November 2004, the United Nations and governmental and non-governmental partners began assisting IDPs to return to their homes. Return and transport assistance had been distributed to over 145,000 IDPs from an anticipated return caseload of 314,000.

76. In Angola, the return process triggered by the end of the civil war in 2002 continued unabated, with another 900,000 displaced being able to return in 2004 and the majority of the 3.8 million IDPs known in 2002 either returning to their areas of origin or integrating into host communities.

77. The Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division continued to promote system-wide improvements in response to internal displacement, including through the strengthening of the collaborative approach, and the provision of technical support to country-specific displacement situations, placing particular emphasis on coordination, protection and return issues. The main focus of the Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division in Africa is on IDPs in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Somalia, the Sudan and Uganda. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, support was provided to the assessment of protection issues, and in outlining a return and reintegration strategy. Advisers on internally displaced

persons were deployed to Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Somalia, the Sudan and Uganda to provide strategic advice to United Nations humanitarian coordinators and country teams.

78. Activities in favour of IDPs also included regular visits to IDP camps, joint missions and interviews of IDPs, and cooperation with United Nations peacekeeping missions. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) continued to cooperate with United Nations peacekeeping operations, United Nations agencies, national human rights institutions and local NGOs to protect the human rights of refugees, returnees and IDPs. In eastern Africa, it provided support to the Human Rights Office of the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea to protect vulnerable groups and communities living in sensitive border areas between Ethiopia and Eritrea, in addition to the monitoring of the repatriation by Ethiopia and Eritrea of each other's nationals, and conducting debriefing interviews of returnees and asylum-seekers.

E. Cooperation with regional organizations and initiatives

79. Positive developments were noted in the area of regional cooperation and commitment to reinforce the protection framework for refugees in Africa. In that respect, the decision by the African Union Heads of States summit, in Abuja in January 2005, to convene a ministerial conference on refugees, IDPs and returnees in Africa in 2006 demonstrates the commitment of Africa to people affected by displacement. The reactivation in May 2005 of the Coordinating Committee on Assistance to Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons, as called for by the African Union Heads of States and the African Union Executive Council, is also a positive step to address refugees, returnees and IDPs issues at the continental level.

80. UNHCR is increasingly involved in the Africa Union's New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) programme, and it continued to function as the secretariat of the United Nations sub-cluster on humanitarian response and post-conflict recovery, of which one of the key priorities is the promotion and implementation of integrated programmes in post-conflict countries to support reconstruction and sustain peace and stability. The sub-cluster is currently analysing 14 African transition situations in order to identify critical gaps and contribute to NEPAD, UNDP and UNHCR work on a strategic framework for more sustainable return and reintegration of IDPs, refugees and ex-combatants.

81. In May 2005, the Economic Community of West African States and UNHCR jointly organized a regional experts meeting on sustainable solutions to situations of forced displacement in West Africa to identify best practices. UNHCR also continued its partnerships with the African Parliamentary Union and the African Commission on Human and People's Rights. The Commission's Special Rapporteur on refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons has visited a number of conflict-afflicted countries and is involved in the planning of the African Commission proposed conference and training initiative on refugee rights, in addition to ongoing efforts to ensure that issues affecting asylum-seekers, refugees and internally displaced persons are addressed holistically among the organs of the African Union.

F. Coordination of resources

82. The consolidated appeals process continued to be an important tool for coordination and strategic planning in complex emergencies and natural disasters in Africa. In 2005, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs launched 17 consolidated appeals for Africa, for a total of close to US$ 2.9 billion. During the year, some appeals, in particular those of Chad, the Sudan, and Uganda, had to be revised in order to reflect increased requirements. A number of flash appeals were also issued, for example, to address the situations in Djibouti and Benin, as a result of the Togolese refugee crisis.

83. Financial tracking by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of donor response to the appeals showed that by mid-June 2005, the overall contributions to those appeals varied from nil to 52 per cent of revised requirements, with the exception of the Angola Marburg haemorrhagic fever flash appeal, covered at 72 per cent. Alarmingly, the large majority of country appeals, including Burundi, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and the Sudan, did not reach the 40 per cent funding rate. The lack of timely, adequate and predictable funding continued negatively to affect the ability of United Nations and humanitarian partners to respond promptly, effectively and in a principled manner to the needs of affected populations. In Darfur, timelier funding would have saved lives and resources.

84. As a result of continued inter-agency efforts to improve the consolidated appeals process, needs assessments and strategic monitoring became more explicit and standardized. In 2005 a new needs assessment framework and matrix, piloted in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2004, provided a common platform for humanitarian coordinators and agencies to analyse assessment data and set priorities. Moreover, individual agencies, such as WFP, introduced improved needs assessment tools for their respective sectors.

IV. Conclusions

85. **The focus on voluntary repatriation for refugees and return of IDPs continued throughout the reporting period, with 330,000 African refugees returning home in 2004.**

86. **For those refugees for whom voluntary repatriation remained elusive, UNHCR continued to pursue self-sufficiency with a view to possible local integration in the host country, as well as to enhance preparation for eventual return. Resettlement continued to be an important durable solution for certain individuals and groups of refugees.**

87. **As well as working on durable solutions, the United Nations and NGOs continued to work closely with national authorities to improve protection for refugees, returnees and IDPs in Africa through advocacy and targeted interventions in capacity-building for Governments and NGOs; training and technical support; to eliminate sexual and gender-based violence programmes; support for physical protection in refugee and IDP camps; registration; and targeted protection programmes for women and children.**

88. **New programming tools, including the systematic use of standards and indicators and participatory assessments with refugees, allowed for improved quantification of the needs of refugees and articulation of the gaps due to resource constraints, but the delivery of assistance remained affected by difficult conditions, security problems, food shortages, logistical problems, climatic constraints and serious funding shortages.**

89. **Positive developments on the political and security front were noted in many regions. Nevertheless, the conflict in the Sudan Darfur region, the Kivus and Ituri regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the continuing insecurity in northern Uganda, south and central Somalia, and civil unrest in Togo and Côte d'Ivoire resulted in significant displacement of populations within and across borders. UNHCR and other organizations continued to update contingency plans for those volatile situations and, where necessary, emergency response mechanisms were put into action. More positively, regional initiatives in conflict prevention and containment in Guinea-Bissau, Guinea and to some extent Côte d'Ivoire and Togo have stemmed the flow of people and allowed for early efforts to resolve the underlying causes of the conflict.**

90. **Sustainable reintegration of returnees and IDPs in post-conflict situations remains a key ingredient to ensure that peace is consolidated and that much-needed development takes place. Inter-agency collaboration to bridge the gap between humanitarian relief and short-term reintegration programmes, on the one hand, and longer-term development and rehabilitation programmes, on the other hand, continue, but funding remains a challenge in most situations.**

91. **To end forced displacement and resolve the problem of refugees and other displaced populations in Africa, concerted efforts by the international community to address the root causes of conflict, including socio-economic deprivation, political repression, intercommunal disputes, unemployment, lack of basic infrastructure and services, and depletion of natural resources must remain a priority. Where progress towards peace and stability has been made, firm political and financial support must be forthcoming to ensure sustainability and long-term development for the continent.**

Notes

[1] The five commitments: encourage active participation of women in all management and leadership committees of refugees in urban, rural and camp settings, including return areas, ensuring 50 per cent of representatives are women; individual registration of all refugee men and women and provide them with relevant documentation; develop integrated country-level strategies to address SGBV; ensure refugee women participate directly and indirectly in management and distribution of food and non-food items; provision of sanitary materials to all women and girls of concern as standard practice in all UNHCR assistance programmes.